

WASHINGTON, DC -- Speaking on the floor of the House of Representatives, Congresswoman Linda Sánchez gave the following speech in opposition to the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement.

“Madam Speaker, tonight I rise to address the House and the American people regarding the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement and its effect on working families.

“Before I launch into my remarks, I want to be clear, I AM committed to trade. I believe trade is an essential component to the development and strengthening of our economy. Done the right way, trade can increase our access to raw material for production and create American jobs. It can open foreign markets to our goods and services and bring new and unique products to the U.S.

“Done the right way, trade can not only contribute to the economic prosperity of America and its working families, it can also strengthen the economic and political stability of our trading partners.

“It is because I believe in the many positive impacts that trade can bring, when done the right way, that I have been fighting for a new trade model.

“The NAFTA-style free trade agreements negotiated by the Bush Administration are the wrong way to do trade. They bring nothing more than empty promises and harm to the American working class.

“My support for smart trade agreements that work for working people means I cannot support the U.S.-Peru FTA. It is based upon the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has resulted in job losses in America, pushed small farmers off the land in Mexico, and jeopardized public health and safety policies in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada.

“When the Administration announced its 'New Policy on Trade' earlier this year I, along with the rest of my colleagues in the House Trade Working Group, was hopeful that the Administration had taken bold steps to improve its trade policy. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that the Peru FTA, along with the rest of the pending trade agreements, retained the basic structure of NAFTA and CAFTA. The bold promises of new protections for workers turned out to be nice promises that had little chance of being enforced.

“The American people are fed up with trade agreements that only benefit the 'haves' while making it harder for the 'have-nots' to get ahead. A recent Wall Street Journal survey identified declining public confidence in the NAFTA-style trade model. According to the survey, 60% of conservative Americans, those whom would have been most apt to support the expansion of free trade, now believe free trade is harmful to the U.S. economy.

“The promises of U.S. job creation and an increased standard of living for the working class have not been fulfilled. Instead, we continue to see the rich get richer and the rest -- the middle and working class -- get left behind.

“The Administration asserts that the new additions to the Peru agreement will add long-sought labor and environmental protections. However, a careful analysis reveals that there are few changes from the basic NAFTA-CAFTA text. And even where there are changes, the new provisions offer few new protections. If the Peru FTA is so great, where is all the union support? Why do so many environmental groups oppose it?

“NAFTA-CAFTA provisions that have caused downward pressure on wages, the export of U.S. jobs, and an import of unsafe products and food, have changed little. This so-called ‘New Deal’ is a bad deal. It's an old clunker with a new coat of paint.

“But even if this ‘New Deal’ contained the most stringent labor and environmental protections in the world, it would be dependent on the Executive Branch for enforcement. And enforcement of labor and environmental standards is something the current administration is unlikely to do. Let's be honest, the Bush Administration has a consistent record of non-enforcement.

“We need a Real New Deal, not another NAFTA clone. Simply put, the NAFTA model doesn't work. It has failed to bring the jobs and prosperity that we were promised. Remember when we were promised that NAFTA would create jobs in Mexico and stem the flow of immigration? Remember when we were promised that NAFTA would ensure that our trading partners would uphold the same strong labor and environmental standards that we have here in the U.S.?

“And now, this Administration is asking us to believe its promise that the labor and environmental provisions in the Peru agreement will be stringently enforced. Well, if the experience of the last 10 years hasn't convinced you, I've got some swampland in Florida that I'd like to sell you.

“So long as we have to rely on this Administration to protect the rights and safety of working men and women, we will continue to be disappointed.

“This Administration's track record does not reflect a real commitment to the working families of America. The truth of the matter is that the NAFTA model heavily favors the wealthiest few, leaving small businesses to fend for themselves on an unequal playing field. The Peru free trade agreement has been advertised as the new model for trade deals. This sounds eerily familiar to what we were told when CAFTA was being pushed. CAFTA was supposed to include bold new wage protections for workers. But those protections were disappointingly weak, allowing countries to downgrade their own labor laws.

“Minor adjustments to NAFTA-style deals such as the U.S.-Peru FTA are not good enough. We need to reject the Peru free trade agreement and I urge all my colleagues to oppose it.”